



SESSION 1

**GOD'S
GENEROUS
HOSPITALITY**

SESSION GOALS

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL

- understand biblical hospitality
- connect personally to what hospitality and lack of hospitality feel like
- recognize that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and their families are often treated inhospitably in churches
- have identified a new step to take to offer hospitality to LGBT people and their families

SESSION 1 OVERVIEW

Each component lists the appropriate time the activity takes and is ranked to help you select the activities that best fit your group.

Opening Activity

Choose one or more from:

- Opening Prayer (3 min)
- Opening Scripture (3 min)
- Song (7 min)

Core Lesson Components

Choose one or more from:

- Video and Discussion (15 min)
- Hospitality Background and Discussion (12 min)
- Define/Describe Hospitality (13 min)
- Bible Exploration and Discussion (20 min)
- GAME: Ingroup-Outgroup (15 min)
- Hospitality Sharing (20 min)
- Hospitality Stories (12 min)

Call to Action

- Call to Action (15 min)

Closing Activity

- Blessing and Sending Forth (4 min)

Key to Component Ranking

CAUTIOUS

A comfortable, safe activity suitable for all, even the most cautious and timid

READY FOR MORE

An activity that requires more critical thinking and sharing: suitable for groups that are ready to take more risks and expand their views

ADVENTUROUS

An activity suitable for groups that are eager to tackle tough subjects, are open to new ideas, and are willing to challenge the status quo

OPENING PRAYER (3 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: United Methodist Hymnal (UMH).

INSTRUCTIONS: Ask a volunteer to read aloud the prayer on page 489 of the UMH: "For God's Gifts."

OPENING SCRIPTURE (3 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: a Bible.

INSTRUCTIONS: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 13:1-2.

SONG (7 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: copies of the UMH, The Faith We Sing (TFWS), other songbooks or song sheets, and piano or song leader.

INSTRUCTIONS: Sing a song from the UMH, TFWS, or other songbook that reflects hospitality, such as

UMH 192 There's a Spirit in the Air
UMH 432 Jesu, Jesu
UMH 434 Cuando el Pobre
TFWS 2126 All Who Hunger (especially verse 2)
TFWS 2175 Together We Serve (all verses)
TFWS 2197 Lord of All Hopefulness (especially verse 3)

Video and Discussion (15 min): "Everybody Is Welcome," Jorge Lockward and Rosita Cortez

MATERIALS NEEDED: a computer ready to play the video file accompanying this curriculum.

INSTRUCTIONS: Watch the video together, then follow up with a discussion. You may view the video by visiting <http://vimeo.com/rethinkinclusion> and selecting the file labeled "God's Generous Hospitality".

INTRODUCTION: Jorge Lockward was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and now lives in New York City. A noted worship leader and lecturer, Jorge has collaborated in the planning and leading of worship for numerous conferences. He currently lectures on music and worship at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and is the Minister of Worship for a new United Methodist Church in the northwest Bronx. Rosita Cortez is the daughter of Christian leaders in Nicaragua. After reconciling her faith and her sexuality, Rosita found the courage to start her life

anew and today is a nonprofit professional, social media consultant, and founder of the well-known blog “Social Media 4 Nonprofits in Plain English.” Rosita holds a master’s degree from Columbia University and is a musician at St. George’s Episcopal Church in New Jersey. Jorge invited Rosita to play the guitar in his church, and they reflect in this video on how powerfully affected she was by the welcome she received the first Sunday she attended.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What is your first reaction to Rosita’s story?
2. What was the source of Rosita’s transformation from someone who had severe panic attacks and a broken spirit to someone who loves God and feels loved by God?
3. What happens when churches offer a conditional welcome by saying, “You’re welcome here...if you change”?
4. What can happen in people’s lives when churches offer a specific welcome to LGBT people?

Hospitality Background and Discussion (12 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: a copy of the following hospitality background material.

INSTRUCTIONS: Have several group participants read aloud a paragraph of the following background material. Follow up with discussion questions.

In biblical times, travelers couldn’t make reservations at the Holiday Inn or Motel 6. They didn’t have McDonald’s for reliable meals. A journey across the desert was often uncomfortable at best and dangerous at worst. People throughout the Mediterranean world regarded the provision of food, lodging, and protection to travelers as a virtue and a sacred duty. The survival of travelers often depended on such hospitality.

But biblical hospitality covers more than merely providing safety for travelers. God’s people are called to practice the hospitality toward one another that mirrors the hospitality God offers people. The experience and practice of hospitality lie at the very core of what it means to be a Christian. Its roots are woven into the foundation of Judaism and Christianity. It’s an obligation that we have to all those with whom we come in contact, including strangers and those who make us feel uncomfortable.

In chapter 18 of Genesis, Abraham and Sarah provide hospitality to three strangers who appear at their tent. The strangers turn out to be Yahweh (God) in human form and two angels. Although Sarah and Abraham do not know the true identity of their visitors, they choose to treat them as honored guests without expecting anything in return. What if Abraham and Sarah had refused hospitality to these strangers? They would have shut themselves off from the blessings

God intended for them. We, too, are called to practice the generous hospitality of Abraham and Sarah.

The New Testament also contains many examples of God's generous hospitality—it's a frequent theme in Jesus' ministry. Jesus talks about hospitality in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the wedding banquet. He models hospitality when he has dinner with Zacchaeus and when he washes the disciples' feet in the upper room. As in the Hebrew Bible, the focus isn't on the worthiness of the recipient, but rather on the faithfulness of the one who offers the hospitality.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Hospitality is a recurrent theme in the Bible. What "hospitality ministries" does our congregation offer?
2. What's the connection between hospitality and faith?
3. How does offering hospitality return blessings to the giver, like Abraham and Sarah?
4. In what ways does offering hospitality reflect the faithfulness of the one doing the offering?

Define/Describe Hospitality (13 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: one copy of the "Hospitality Definitions" handout sheet.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Have class participants separate into pairs and take 3 to 5 minutes to describe God's generous hospitality. What are the aspects of it? What does receiving it feel like?
- Have each pair share their description/definition of hospitality with the group.
- Ask volunteers to read aloud the three definitions of hospitality found on the "Hospitality Definitions" handout sheet. Then ask for reflections or comments from the group.
- *Hospitality is the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers. It is the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way. Synonyms are warmth, cordiality, geniality, friendliness. (dictionary.com)*
- *Hospitality is the attitude and practice of providing the atmosphere and opportunities, however risky, in which strangers are free to become friends, thereby feeling accepted, included, and loved. The relationship thus opens up the*

possibility for eventual communion among the host, the stranger, and God.
(Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager. *Deep & Wide, Hospitality and the Faithful Church*. Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest; 2008, p. 21)

- *Hospitality involves recognizing the presence of Christ in family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and complete strangers. It means responding to others as we would respond to the presence of Christ in our midst.* (Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager. *Deep & Wide, Hospitality and the Faithful Church*. Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest; 2008, p. 22)

▣ Bible Exploration and Discussion (20 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Bibles, the list of verses, newsprint or whiteboard and markers, or chalkboard and chalk.

INTRODUCTION: The Gospels tell us about Jesus' ministry, and the book of Acts chronicles the experiences of the early church after the resurrection.

INSTRUCTIONS: (5 min) Give each individual or small group (there should be no more than four people in a group) one or two of the following passages. Ask them to read the passages and look especially for elements of hospitality or different people to whom hospitality is being offered.

Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus)

Luke 10:29-37 (Good Samaritan)

Luke 14:7-24 (Great Dinner)

John 13:1-20 (Foot washing)

Acts 8:14-17 (Samaritans)

Acts 8:38-39 (Eunuch)

Acts 10:45-48 (Gentiles)

Acts 16:13-15 (Women)

} Can be grouped together as needed

} Can be grouped together as needed

Discussion (15 min)

1. What kinds of people are being received and treated as guests? Who's being invited into a relationship with God?
2. For our time, who are the Samaritans? (**list on newsprint or chalkboard**)
Some ideas to "prime" the discussion or add to the list:
 - *those who we sense are related to us but with whom we have no connection*
 - *those who have intermarried with other faiths or denominations*
 - *those who are of our faith but whose expression of faith is unfamiliar to us*
 - *those who are of our denomination but whose beliefs contradict our own*

3. For our time, who are the eunuchs? **(list on newsprint or chalkboard)**

Some ideas to “prime” the discussion or add to the list:

- *those who don't marry*
- *those who are physically altered by intention, accident, or birth*
- *those who are barren or sterile*
- *those who don't plan to have children*
- *those whose families don't look quite like everyone else's*

4. For our time, who are the Gentiles, the uncircumcised? **(list on newsprint or chalkboard)**

Some ideas to “prime” the discussion or add to the list:

- *those new to the church or not brought up in the church*
- *those who look different from people we expect to find in church (different dress, hairstyle, jewelry, body art, etc.)*

5. Why do we tend to keep those who are different from us at arm's length?

Whether we think of encountering an angel in the stranger or the actual presence of Christ, there's no question about the importance placed on hospitality to the stranger who can be recognized in a whole host of marginalized persons.

GAME: INGROUP-OUTGROUP (15 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: space to move around.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Ask the group to stand in a circle and hold hands.
- Ask for a volunteer.
- Ask the volunteer to stand outside the circle.
- Give the volunteer only the following instruction: **“Your job is to get in.”**
- Don't give any other instructions. Repeat that instruction if necessary.
- Say **“GO”** to indicate that the game is starting.
- After a few minutes or after the person gets in, ask for a new volunteer.
- Repeat the same procedure.
- After a few minutes or after the person gets in, ask for a new volunteer and play another round or invite people to return to their seats to discuss the game.

Game discussion:

Ask the volunteers:

1. What did it feel like to be on the outside trying to get in?

Ask the rest of the group:

2. What did it feel like to be part of the circle? (*Note: Most of the time, the group automatically works together to keep the person outside the circle. It's okay to recognize that it was **fun** to work together to keep the person out.*)

Ask everyone:

3. What were the instructions? (After a few responses, remind them that the only instruction given was to the person outside the circle and it was, "Your job is to get in.")
4. Why did we do the things we did in this game?
5. How is this game like real life?
6. How does it relate to the practice of hospitality?

□ Hospitality Sharing (20 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: copies of the Hospitality Sharing sheets if your group will be dividing into smaller groups.

INTRODUCTION: We can connect to each other's lives and discover wisdom through stories. Throughout human history, people have learned and bonded through storytelling. Each person's story has no right or wrong interpretation. When we hear someone else's story, we often hear strains of our own.

INSTRUCTIONS: If the class is larger than eight, divide into smaller groups for this activity. Have someone in each group read the question.

1. Was there ever an occasion when you were excluded? (*Pause to allow people to think.*)
How did you feel? (*Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.*)
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?
2. Have you ever participated in excluding someone else? (*Pause to allow people to think.*)
How did you feel? (*Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.*)
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?
3. Have you ever been the recipient of generous hospitality or been warmly (maybe unexpectedly) included? (*Pause to allow people to think.*)
How did that feel? (*Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.*)
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?
4. Have you ever reached out and included someone different from yourself?
(*Pause to allow people to think.*)
How did you feel? (*Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.*)
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?

■ **Hospitality Stories (12 min)**

MATERIALS NEEDED: a copy of each of the “Hospitality Stories” to be read.

INTRODUCTION: The Bible urges the broad practice of hospitality—the recognition of Christ in all those we encounter. Hospitality is often denied to LGBT people and their families and friends. When hospitality is offered to LGBT people, it can be received as a generous gift.

INSTRUCTIONS: Ask for volunteers to read aloud one or more of the “Hospitality Stories.”

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What are other ways LGBT people, as well as their families and friends, are excluded and denied hospitality in our church? (*Note: “church” here could mean the local congregation and/or the United Methodist Church as a denomination.*)
2. In what ways can lack of hospitality toward LGBT people affect their lives? Affect the church community?
3. In what ways can generous hospitality benefit both the givers and the receivers?

■ **CALL TO ACTION (15 min)**

MATERIALS NEEDED: newsprint or whiteboard and markers, chalkboard and chalk, or paper and pens for list-making, plus a copy of “How Welcoming Is Your Congregation?”

INTRODUCTION: How will we respond to the biblical call to practice generous hospitality—specifically hospitality toward LGBT people and their families? Generous hospitality is something that we can make part of *our daily lives* and also part of the *daily life of our church community*.

Action in Our Faith Community

INSTRUCTIONS: As a group, make a list of specific things your congregation could do to expand its ministry of hospitality to LGBT people and their families and friends. (*If you have difficulty with this task, see the worksheet “How Welcoming Is Your Congregation?” for ideas.*)

1. Choose one or two items from the list your group generated and agree on two things related to that item that can be done before the next meeting.
2. Decide who will do these tasks and report back at the next meeting.

Individual Action: What can I do to practice generous hospitality?

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take two or three minutes and make a written list of actions to express generous hospitality.
2. Choose one item from your list to commit to this week.

Blessing and Sending Forth (4 min)

INSTRUCTIONS: With the group standing in a circle, pass this blessing from person to person. The leader turns and faces the participant on the left, grasps both hands, looks that person in the eye, and says:

I see the presence of Christ in you.

Go and share the warmth and welcome of Christ.

Each participant repeats these actions and words around the circle. When the blessing gets back to the leader,

he or she says:

And the people of God said

The people reply:

Amen!



Notes



HOSPITALITY DEFINITIONS HANDOUT 1

“HOSPITALITY IS THE FRIENDLY RECEPTION AND TREATMENT OF GUESTS OR STRANGERS. IT IS THE QUALITY OR DISPOSITION OF RECEIVING AND TREATING GUESTS AND STRANGERS IN A WARM, FRIENDLY, GENEROUS WAY. SYNONYMS ARE WARMTH, CORDIALITY, GENIALITY, FRIENDLINESS.”

--dictionary.com

“HOSPITALITY IS THE ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF PROVIDING THE ATMOSPHERE AND OPPORTUNITIES, HOWEVER RISKY, IN WHICH STRANGERS ARE FREE TO BECOME FRIENDS, THEREBY FEELING ACCEPTED, INCLUDED, AND LOVED. THE RELATIONSHIP THUS OPENS UP THE POSSIBILITY FOR EVENTUAL COMMUNION AMONG THE HOST, THE STRANGER, AND GOD.”

--Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager. Deep & Wide, Hospitality and the Faithful Church. Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest; 2008, p. 21

“HOSPITALITY INVOLVES RECOGNIZING THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN FAMILY, FRIENDS, COWORKERS, NEIGHBORS, AND COMPLETE STRANGERS. IT MEANS RESPONDING TO OTHERS AS WE WOULD RESPOND TO THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN OUR MIDST.”

--Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager. Deep & Wide, Hospitality and the Faithful Church. Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest; 2008, p. 22

HOSPITALITY SHARING HANDOUT 2

- 1. Was there ever an occasion when you were excluded?** *(Pause to allow people to think.)*
How did you feel? *(Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.)*
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?
- 2. Have you ever participated in excluding someone else?** *(Pause to allow people to think.)*
How did you feel? *(Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.)*
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?
- 3. Have you ever been the recipient of generous hospitality or been warmly (maybe unexpectedly) included?** *(Pause to allow people to think.)*
How did that feel? *(Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.)*
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?
- 4. Have you ever reached out and included someone different from yourself?** *(Pause to allow people to think.)*
How did you feel? *(Pause to allow people to identify their feelings.)*
Would anyone care to share that experience briefly with the group?

HOSPITALITY STORY 1 HANDOUT 3

As a new seminary student, I was feeling overwhelmed. I was born and raised in a small Southern town and was finding it difficult to adjust to urban living. However, adjusting to the liberating experience of being out of the closet was easy. It was so wonderful not only to be able to openly profess myself as a lesbian, but also to find acceptance and support from people of faith and church communities. One of those supportive church friends bought me my first rainbow ribbon, and I proudly pinned it to my book satchel. Every time I looked at my satchel, I found myself thinking of how lucky I was to have a friend I could pray with and talk to and how empowered I felt.

One of my professors gave us an assignment to visit several worship services in different traditions. We were to attend, participate in the service, and write a review of our experience. I decided to visit a small church that I had driven past during one of the many “time to return to the country” moments I had been using to adjust to city life. Other than being Baptist, it looked a lot like the church I grew up in. I was pleased and excited.

I arrived before the service, drew my book satchel onto my shoulder, and smiled as I walked into the church. As I made my way to a pew in the middle of the church, I noticed an usher walk over to a man who appeared to be a deacon and begin whispering and looking over at me. I thought he was telling the deacon that I was a visitor. As I sat down, the deacon and the usher walked over to me. They weren't smiling.

The deacon leaned in and said softly, “Excuse me.”

“Yes?” I replied.

“Wouldn't you be more comfortable somewhere else?”

Smiling naively, I looked up at him and said, “Oh, no thank you, I'm perfectly comfortable where I am. Thank you so much though!”

The deacon and the usher looked at each another, and the deacon said, “No, wouldn't you be more comfortable somewhere other than here?”

“Huh?” I said, not understanding what they were getting at.

The deacon pointed to the rainbow ribbon on my satchel. “I don't think this is exactly the best place for you. You'd be more comfortable somewhere else.”

The whole time he escorted me out the back door I was too shocked to think. Driving back to the seminary, I kept playing the conversation over in my head—“Wouldn't you be more comfortable somewhere else?”

HOSPITALITY STORY 2

I've been a member of the United Methodist Church all my life—I was baptized and confirmed. I was really involved with my church youth group and served on the conference council on youth ministry for two years.

At college, I joined the Wesley Foundation and loved it. There, I realized that I had always known *about* Jesus, but never really *knew* Him and hadn't accepted Him as my Savior. So I gave my life to Christ and never looked back.

The summer after my freshman year, I also realized that I was attracted to other men. I didn't know what to do. At first I tried to bury my feelings. Then, I sat down with my campus minister and confessed my secret. He prayed with me, promising that together we would get through this.

Thus began a two-year journey of prayer and study. I prayed every day. I cried almost every day. I didn't want to be attracted to guys. It went against what I had been taught, so I struggled hard. At the breaking point one night, I cried out to God, "I can't do this any more. It's tearing me apart and killing my relationship with You. I don't know whether it's the right thing to do or not, God, but I have to stop this. It will destroy me or push me away from my faith." When I got really quiet, I heard God say to me, "That's okay, I love you anyway." To which I replied, "Okay, God, I'm gay."

During my senior year, I decided to come out to the Wesley Foundation. The campus minister then said that I could no longer lead devotions and canceled one that was scheduled so as not to give the appearance of approving my "lifestyle." I was told at the church where I had been helping with the youth group that since I now considered myself gay, it would be best that I didn't come back on Sunday nights because the parents wouldn't like it. I was graduating soon, so I decided it wasn't worth fighting over.

After graduation, I moved and soon found another Wesley Foundation with a community group for grad students. They really welcomed me: I never hid the fact that I was gay, but I didn't bring it up either. By spring, my relationship with God was back on track, and I was really trying to live His will for my life. I felt that God was calling me to share the fact of my sexuality with the group. The campus minister questioned my intelligence for believing that homosexuality was natural and my faith for believing that God was okay with it. I tried explaining that I simply wanted to share what it felt like to be a gay Christian in a community that isn't accepting of homosexuality. But I was silenced again—rejected by my church family, the family that made promises to me at baptism.

I kept being called home to my Methodist roots and traditions. I missed the church that loved me and taught me that Jesus loves me. I moved back to the town where I had gone to college. My first Sunday there, I accepted with joy a friend's invitation to a United Methodist Church. I went there and loved it—the praise, the worship, the warmth, and the welcome. Quickly feeling at home, I became a greeter and usher. I wanted to transfer my membership. When the pastor announced a membership class, I jumped at the chance. After the class, I set up the required one-on-one meeting with the pastor, figuring that it was just a formality since I was already a lifelong member of the United Methodist Church. At the end of the meeting, he said, "I understand that you consider yourself gay." I told him the truth. Since I wasn't willing to participate in ex-gay reparative therapy or commit to lifelong celibacy, he said that it wouldn't be appropriate for me to join and denied my transfer of membership.

Somehow through this long and difficult journey, I've clung to God and my faith. I simply want to go to church—my home church—in the neighborhood where I choose to live. I want to participate in that church as the full member I already am, equally and without hesitation. I want to be fully welcomed in the church that I love so much, where I have given so much of my time and service.

HOSPITALITY STORY 3

I'm from Canada, but my boyfriend lives in the States. It makes for a crazy relationship! After nine months of long-distance dating, I was able to move to his city for four months because I had the summer off from my job. We were very excited about this and were looking forward to experiencing life only a 25-minute walk apart instead of a 10-hour drive!

Those four months were wonderful! One of the reasons was the small United Methodist church my boyfriend attends. This church was in many ways my dream church. It was welcoming to gay people, but gay issues didn't dominate it. Most members weren't gay, but we were still welcome. It was a place where my boyfriend and I could worship as ourselves. We didn't have to hide our relationship but could actually ask people to pray for us as we discerned God's will for our lives.

Relationships, whether gay or straight, are challenging, and it's always nice to have people willing to support you with a listening ear or loving advice. I was very sad to go back to Canada at the end of the summer, especially since the church I attend there isn't very welcoming to gay people. However, I'm so grateful that my boyfriend continues to have a community of Christian support around him, a community that will continue to help us as we determine the future of our relationship.

HOW WELCOMING IS YOUR CONGREGATION? HANDOUT 4

Communities of faith exist to bring “good news” and care to everyone.

In which of the following ways does your congregation demonstrate this to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and their families?

- Genuine welcome is offered to LGBT people and their families and friends (list the ways they would know that).
- There are obvious signs of welcome for LGBT people who walk or drive by your church building.
- Your church directory includes photos of LGBT families.
- Openly LGBT congregants are found in leadership positions (including Sunday school teachers, youth workers, staff).
- Youth who identify themselves as LGBT are in your youth group.
- The congregation participates in LGBT Pride celebrations in the local community.
- The pastor or church staff offer appropriate pastoral care to LGBT people and their families (identify the ways someone would know that such care is available).
- Sexuality is dealt with openly in your congregation.
- Sexuality is addressed in your religious education programs for children, youth, and adults.
- Your church library and literature rack include resources related to welcoming LGBT people, support groups for families (such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG]), and LGBT teens.
- LGBT people are mentioned in children's sermons.

___ Your church has baptized children with LGBT parents.

___ Your church offers guidance on matters of sexuality and relationships to all couples, including same gender, partnered, not married, and youth.

___ Sermons contain illustrations about LGBT people and their lives.

___ The church facility has a unisex restroom that is accessible to and safe for transgender people.

___ Your church offers blessings to same-gender relationships (if so, list the ways the church makes this known).

___ Your church makes space available for LGBT-related support groups such as PFLAG.

___ Your congregation celebrates the anniversaries of LGBT couples.

___ Concerns of LGBT people and their families are mentioned in pastoral and intercessory prayers.